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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether male and female writers would respond in identifiably different ways to the same writing task, and whether a content analysis of the discourse produced for these writing tasks would reveal distinctly "male" and "female" concerns. It was hypothesized that themes relating to autonomy would appear more often in men's essays, while women would write more frequently about their connectedness to others. Two hundred essays, one on each of two topics and written by 50 men and 50 women selected from a university writing proficiency test, were examined by male/female pairs of raters. The first topic asked students to identify an unreasonable demand that had been made of them, while the second required students to identify a decision they regretted making. Surprisingly, the results indicated a greater number of autonomous responses for both topics. The demand topic produced 72 autonomous and 25 connected responses. The autonomous responses occurred in precisely equal proportions for each sex. Of the 25 connected responses, 14 were written by women, 11 by men. The decision topic produced 64 autonomous responses, 36 written by men and 28 by women. Of the connected responses to this topic, 22 were written by women and 14 by men. Although women produced fewer connected than autonomous responses, and although some of the connected responses were produced by men, the overall pattern within sex was for men to produce the autonomous responses and for women to account for most of the connected responses. (HTH)

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But What Do They Say?

Gender and the Content of Student Writing

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During the late nineteen sixties and on into the seventies, issues involving women bristled in the forefront of public attention - in the popular press, on television and in film, and, of course,in the academy. Feminist literary criticism came into its own, and women's language became a particularly fascinating object of scrutiny as scholars detected in the discourse of men and women mirrors of their positions in society. Lakoff (1975), Thorne (1975), Key (1975), Miller and Swift (1977), Jenkins (1980), Kramarae (1981) and others studied various patterns of women's speech. In addition, some scholars have investigated women's written style. Hiatt (1979), for example, studied particular stylistic features, such as sentence length and the use of adverbs, in an effort to refute the claim that women's writing was more verbose and emotional than men's.

During all this time, college students, male and female, were writing, as college students do; but few people thought to look at what they were producing, unaware, it would seem, that their writing constituted a rich mine for study and insight. In the journals that deal with college level English teaching there was, for a brief moment, a flurry of articles having to do with particular problems women students might encounter in writing courses. Bolker (1978) addressed the difficulty "good girls" have writing vigorous, energetic papers that reveal a strong personal voice, so concerned are they with pleasing the teacher. Piggot (1978) claimed that women's writing style was too often locked into the particulars of personal experience which the writers often failed to place in a broader context; since this analytical distance is what academic writing often requires, women who use this style are at a disadvantage. Taylor (1979) observed that women in writing classes often find themselves in a classic

"double-bind" situation, expected to write in an assertive, even an argumentative mode that is contrary to all they were taught about appropriate feminine behavior.

But the last of these articles appeared in 1979, and scholars have turned their attention elsewhere. It is a curious fact that even within composition studies, while researchers have energetically tracked the phases of the writing process, plotted the curves of lengthening t-units and traced the history of rhetoric, most of their scholarship has focused on the structure[1] rather than the content of student writing. This is unfortunate, for beyond the common sense notion that we should listen to what students actually say when they write, there is evidence to suggest that gender might make a difference in <u>what</u> as well as how students write; exploring the effects of gender on the written discourse produced by students might add to our knowledge of the ways in which gender influences language use and the ways in which men and women perceive their worlds.

Graves (1973-5), working with grade school children, discovered that in their writing boys dealt with topics having to do with "extended territory," removed from home, school, and neighborhood more than girls did. Janet White (1984) in a large scale longitudinal study in Great Britain, has concluded that across various grade levels, girls are more likely to write about themselves and their families, while boys write more frequently about sports, a subject more external to themselves. White has found that while girls are more likely to feel confident about their ability to write well, this confidence decreases as they advance in school, although they continue to perform at a higher level of proficiency than do boys. The girls' higher achievement in writing in school is not reflected in their life after

school. In fact, White found that women are virtually absent in those professions, such as law and university research and teaching, where writing is vital to advancement. The talent that distinguishes them in school appears to have little effect on their efforts to pursue professional careers.

Carol Gilligan's work, In a Different Voice, tracing themes of autonomy in men's responses to moral dilemmas and connectedness in women's responses, offers a helpful framework for analyzing the writing of college students. Gilligan builds on Chodorow's analysis of the mother/child relationship. Chodorow (1978) has explained that a boy achieves his masculine identity by separating from his mother, attaining autonomy as he outgrows his dependence upon her and adopts the role of an independent, active individual. According to Chodorow, daughters are permitted to maintain more elements of the original closely bonded mother-child relationship; as a result, females develop with a greater capacity for nurturance and empathy and a sense of identity that focuses on connectedness rather than differentiation. A girl forms her gender identity by becoming like the mother who has cared for her, developing the capacity for nurturance and connectedness with relative ease. The independence and autonomy typical of the boy's movement toward adulthood may be less easy for women to attain, while men may find caring and dependency difficult.

Gilligan's central assumption is "that the language people use to talk about their lives and the connections they make reveal the world they see and in which they act" (p.2). The language her male subjects used to describe the relationships between themselves and others tended to focus on individuation and individual achievement, on personal autonomy. Women's language, on the other hand, dealt more with the conflict between

the individual self and its relationship to others. Woman, according to Gilligan "locates herself in relation to the world, describing herself through actions that bring her into connection with others" (p.35). Issues of dependency are thus experienced differently by men and women. Faced with a conflict between commitment to work and family relationships, for example, men tend to abstract the problem from its context, while women proceed from a premise of connection. For women such conflicts become issues of self-sacrifice and care; for men, issues of self-expression and individual rights.

If Gilligan's premise, that men and women perceive and respond to the world in identifiably different ways, is valid, then the themes that characterize their distinctive ways of viewing the world should be evident in the way they write about certain personal issues.

This paper will discuss the results of a study of several hundred essays written by an equal number of male and female students in response to several prompts. We set out to discover whether themes relating to autonomy would appear more often in men's essays, while women would write more frequently about their connectedness to others. We wanted to know whether male and female writers would respond in identifiably different ways to the same writing task, and to discover whether a content analysis of the discourse produced for these writing occasions would reveal distinctively "male" and "female" concerns? Although in general students respoonded in ways that correspond to what Gilligan has identified as masculine themes of autonomy and feminine themes of connectedness, the findings overall were more surprising than predictable.

GATHERING THE DATA

The data for this study were derived from two administrations of a large-scale writing proficiency test written by upper division students at San Francisco State University. All students must take this test in order to graduate, so the cross-section of students is broad, particularly so since the student population on this large urban campus is diverse, with a wide range of age, ethnic, and socio-economic groups represented. For this test, students are given one hour in which to write an expository essay on an assigned topic. The test is evaluated holistically by a group of trained composition instructors.

The essays used for this study were written on 2 topics. The first asked students to identify an unreasonable demand that had been made of them, to explain why they felt it was unreasonable, and to discuss how they had responded to the demand. The second topic required the writers to identify a decision they regretted making,to explain why it didn't work out and to discuss what they learned from the experience.

Both topics demanded expository responses in which students had to describe, discuss, and analyze. Topic 1, by its very nature might have been expected to produce answers that were "connected," while topic 2 seemed to allow for more autonomous responses, focusing as it did on something the writers had done, rather than on something that had been asked of them by someone else. The findings in this regard were interesting and will be discussed at length later in this paper.

PROCEDURES:

From among the passing responses to each test, we gathered a random sample of one hundred essays, 50 written by men and 50 written by women. Thus the total sample for the study,(not including an initial 250 essays read for a pilot study,) was 200 essays. One of the things that had prompted this study in the first place was the feeling on the part of many readers that they could distinguish intuitively an essay written by a man and one written by a woman. In an effort to discover whether these "hunches" were in fact accurate, as well as to preclude any bias by the coders, an assistant recorded the name and sex of each writer and then obscured this information from the booklets in which the exams were written so that the coders were unaware of which papers were written by men and which by women.

Using Gilligan's themes, and working with a team of 3 other readers, I devised a scheme to code the responses as connected or autonomous.Because there is some evidence (Kramarae, 1981) that suggests that the gender of the researcher may influence the results of studies involving linguistic differences between males and females, an equal number of men and women comprised the team coding the responses. After inter-rater reliability had been established, the coders read in male/female pairs, first coding the essays separately, then meeting to work out any differences in assessment. In the rare cases of unresolvable differences, I as principal investigator determined the final coding an essay received .

According to Gilligan's masculine and feminine modes of perceiving and relating to the world, autonomy is primary for men while relationships are vital for women. If these themes are strongly evident in student writing, they may help to account for the intuitive sense many readers have when they "recognize" a piece of anonymous prose as having been written by

a man or a woman. Further, since essay tests are generally scored by both male and female readers, there is at least a possibility of a sympathetic bias on the part of each in favor of the underlying values or perspectives of writers of the same sex. Knowing whether the anticipated themes indeed show up in the writing of men and women would be a first step in determining the effect of such a bias on the evaluation of student writing.

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS:

Overall, a greater number of autonomous responses occurred for both topics. Topic I, the demand topic, produced 72 autonomous and 25 connected responses. The autonomous responses occurred in precisely equal proportions for each sex. 36 of the male and 36 of the female writers responded autonomously. But of the 25 connected responses (3 essays were unfinished and thus uncoded) a larger number, 14 (or 56%) were written by women, 11 (44%) by men.

Writers produced 64 autonomous responses to Topic 2, the decision topic. Of the autonomous responses to Topic 2, 35 (or 56%) were written by men and 28 (or 44%) by women. Of the 36 connected responses to this topic, 22 (61%) were written by women and 14 (38%) by men.

Although women produced fewer connected than autonomous responses, and although some of the connected responses were produced by men, the overall pattern within sex is for men to produce more of the autonomous responses (56%, topic II) and for women to account for most of the connected responses (56%, topic I; 61%, topic II).

(see table 1)

DISCUSSION

Although the study was not planned with this in mind, we might have anticipated that Topic 1, which dealt explicitly with the demands made on the individual by others, would produce a greater number of connected responses. Topic 2, which concerned a decision made solely by the writer, might have been expected to produce a larger number of autonomous responses. In fact, both topics elicited large numbers of autonomous responses, with the largest numbers coming from Topic 1. It is true, however, that of those students who produced connected responses for both topics, a larger percent were female, thus bearing out the pattern we anticipated. Less predictable was the fact that an equal number of men and women produced autonomous responses. The high number of autonomous responses by students of both sex is dramatic.

Topic 1

It is in two responses, one from a man, one from a woman, to a similar demand that each assume a parental role within their families, that the connectedness and autonomous themes reflected in Topic I are brought into sharp relief. The woman writes of being expected to drop her own plans to take care of her younger brother and of feeling guilty that she is bothered by her parents' lack of consideration for her and her own plans. Her response reveals her ambivalence. "Since I am living at home, I owe it to my parents to help care for the baby, but my brother is not my child. Still, I feel guilty about feeling that they are taking advantage of me by expecting me to drop my own plans to care for him." At the time the essay was written, she had still not discussed the

matter with her parents. A man writing of a similar problem, being expected to be the "man of the house," a surrogate father to his little step-sister, displays no guilt or conflict over asserting his right to his own identity. "It didn't seem fair to me that it be my responsibility to pick up the pieces or fill in the gap when my mother's second marriage failed. I wasn't mature enough to be a father, so instead of trying to fill an impossible role, I concentrated on being the best son and brother I could be." This writer does not default on his connection to his family, but he does not maintain that connection at the expense of his own autonomy. These are almost paradigmatic male-autonomous/female-connected responses.

While 60% of the demands perceived by both male and female writers as unreasonable were made by parents, the demands themselves were various. Men (20%) and women(18%) alike felt considerable pressure to excel, to live up to a particular standard,-- of material success, academic achievement, or athletic accomplishment. One man's typically autonomous response to such a demand was, "I'm not going to be a material success just to please someone else's ego." In a similar vein, a woman states, "It may seem a bit selfish ... but, after all, it is your life and when you are an adult you are the only person who can truly decide what is best for you inside your own conscience." A woman writer facing a similar demand, and attempting to incorporate her father's wishes into her life, produces this connected response: "It is my purpose to see to it that my father will one day be comfortable with the decisions I have made." Another student similarly writes, " I hope my parents understand my choice and will support me in my life's work and be proud of me."

But a connected response does not necessarily deny the importance of the

individual. As one male writer observes, "We must realize how much we depend on others to understand where an individual actually stands in this world." Nor does an autonomous response disregard the individual's connection to others, as the following woman reveals: "My friends are very important to me, but so is my work and my future career. I have learned that I must be true to my own needs and very direct with my friends who do not understand them. I may, to my regret, lose a friend because I cannot find extra time, but my goals are very important to me now." The writer has made a choice, though not without some conflict; women writers struggle in greater numbers to reconcile their individual needs with the demands of those they care for, producing more essays dealing with this issue than do the men.

While men and women are expected to excel in equal numbers, fully twice as many men (66%) as women (33%) write of demands relating to the choice of careers. A man whose father wants him to become a doctor like himself complains that his father "didn't consider what my career objectives were, or take the time to listen to my objections, or even ask me if that's what I wanted to be. I became strong enough in my own convictions and judgments to be able to resist him and eventually do and become what and who I wanted." A writer who felt unequal to his father's expectation that he become a lawyer produced a more connected response, explaining that "I have treated the demand as a challenge to achieve. I have enrolled in political science and history classes to prepare me. I am optimistic that I can meet this demand now that I understand how much he cares for me."

Although women wrote less frequently about pressures to choose certain careers, several wrote of demands to pursue non-traditional paths. Men and women pressured to pursue the same career show

interesting differences in their responses. A woman whose father is pressuring her to become a doctor but who doesn't feel "mentally competent or responsible enough" decides to become a nurse, hoping that "in years to come I may look back on nursing as a stepping stone towards attaining my father's demand." This woman's decision to become a nurse is a direct result of her connection to and desire to please or maintain that connection with her father. Another woman writes of her decision not to pursue a medical career in a tone that is more self-assured.

> I didn't follow my father's advice to go into medicine because I am not interested and therefore do not do well in science courses and I do not have the patience to go into medicine. Becoming a doctor will also be too demanding for me since I will have to sacrifice a lot of my freedom when answering to emergencies at all hours of the day.

She elaborates on these reasons, ending with her decision to major in Business Information Computing, a choice with which she is obviously comfortable not just because it suits her, but also because she has been able to convince her father that it is a good one. She writes,

> My father's hope for my becoming a doctor will never come true. However, he understands my situation and he knows that I will never enjoy being a doctor. When I was still in high school, he used to say that if only he had the opportunity to take up medicine, he would... Fortunately, when I chose this as my major with approval from my other aunts, my father realized that we are now entering the Computer Age and there are other professions than medicine which will insure a bright future for me. Therefore, he gave me his blessing.

Here is a writer who has chosen a path that suits her, but whose relationship with her father remains a central concern. Consider a contrasting response to a similar demand:

> During my first year at college, I was hard pressed to declare a pre-medical major by my overbearing father. When it became apparent that I had neither the intelligence nor the desire to embark upon such a course of study, my father became dissatisfied with me as a human being. As a result, our relationship suffered and has never been the same. He could not understand my reasons for negating the idea of becoming a surgeon- his specific choice- and refused to accept them as intelligent, rational arguments.

This is the last mention of his father. The rest of his essay discusses the writer's reasons for choosing not to become a surgeon and ends with the assertion, "I know that I have made the correct decision in becoming an English major." This essay presents an interesting contrast to the more connected response of the woman above. Notable are the distance he puts between himself and his father, and the apparent lack of conflict he now expresses over his choice. Once mentioned, the damaged relationship with his father is dismissed, making this autonomous response almost curt in tone. Similar contrasts can be observed in the following pair of responses to pressure to enter the ministry.

1. I am going to enter a seminary to study theology in the fall. My decision to become an ordained minister will hopefully come naturally after my first year of studies at the seminary. My father, who is an ordained clergy, is very supportive of my decision and encourages me to wait until the end of my first year to work towards ordination. The rest of my family and the majority of my friends, however, assume that I will seek ordination immediately and be "just like your father."
   My father is a well respected and wise man. He has a position of authority in the church and serves on large committees such as the World Council of Churches. His is not a life that I choose to mimic. I am largely influenced by him as any child is, but I am a separate person and many of our ideas differ. Since he is so widely known, however, it is close to impossible to escape the knowing glances, nods of approval and open comments from friends who think there is a family clergy team on the rise. I find myself very angry most of the time at everyone who has placed this demand upon me. I do not feel they have considered the fact that I am an adult who is making personal choices for my career. Not choices to be like my father!
   My solution to this problem is rather extreme, but I am sure it is appropriate. I have chosen to leave California and attend seminary in New Jersey. I will be away from the loud love and concern of my friends and involved in a neutral atmosphere where my father's

reputation will be unable to follow me. After my first year I will decide whether or not to proceed with ordination. I know my friends and family want what is best for me and so I have at least lived up to their expectation in part, because I am doing what I know is right for me.

2. The holiest, most respected profession, in my mother's eyes, is the ministry. Ever since I was in grade school, my mother has pressured me to join the clergy. Her main reason is that she feels it will bring respect to our family. This comes from an old family tradition that the more members of the clergy a family creates, the holier that family is.
The demand that I become a minister is unreasonable because it is a very great sacrifice for me to make just to please my mother's sense of tradition. She is expecting me to give up my freedom, not to mention my sex life, so that she can feel that our family is more respectable.
I have never felt that I would be doing the world a lot of good by becoming a minister; the only person who would benefit from such a thing is my mother. Once I saw that it was just a selfish desire on her part, I didn't have trouble resisting my mother's demands..When I was in sixth grade and didn't volunteer to be confirmed my mother was very disappointed in me and that bothered me for a while. But by the time I went to college my mother's suggestions that I go a religious school did not affect me.
I don't feel good about ignoring her when she talks about something that is as important to her as what my devotion in life should be, but I have to choose a life that is meaningful to me.

It is not easy to pin down the differences between these passages. Both deal with the issue of becoming a minister, of making one's own career choice. Both mention the power of parental or family influence on this decision. But the first response is the more connected of the two. For one thing, note the sheer amount of space the writer devotes to the discussion of father, family and friends. For another, the central focus of the essay is the <u>difficulty</u> the writer is experiencing in making independent choices, free of the confusing and frustrating concern of loved ones for whom she feels obvious affecection. Finally, the solution to the conflict is, as the writer admits, extreme: she must divorce herself from all those she is connected to in order to function as an autonomous individual. Autonomy for this writer, a woman, has

indeed involved a struggle to disconnect. The second writer, on the other hand, while concerned with his mother's wishes, has really not struggled with them much since sixth grade. While he regrets her disappointment, his first concern is for a life that he finds meaningful. While my purpose in this study was not to do a grammatical or syntactical analysis of these essays, it is interesting to compare the structure of the final sentences of each of these passages. The first writer's assertion that she is doing something "right for her," comes in a dependent clause that renders that idea subordinate to the one containing the statement about her family and friends. The second writer ends with an independent clause that asserts his right to choose his own path. Form here seems to have reinforced content.

Although pressure to excel and to choose particular careers were mentioned most often,(38%, 24%), 19% of the writers discussed demands made upon them to play a particular social and/or familial role. Among these are are demands to marry early and raise a family, conform to a community stereotype or conventional sex role, or act as a surrogate parent. 63% of those writing of the demand to play a social or familial role were women, most of them discussing the pressure from family or society at large to conform to certain social conventions, ranging from the demand to be more "ladylike," to being asked to choose betwen career and motherhood. Several men wrote of the pressure they felt to change their sexual orientation from gay to straight, all responding, after some initial distress over the struggle with their families, with autonomous assertions such as one writer's declaration that "I have come to realize that not doing what was expected of me has been the right thing for me." Regardless of the social demands, all but one man responded autonomously. That one response is noteworthy because the

demand he writes about is that men in this society are expected to be "independent, " a demand perceived as unreasonable because "no one can exist without depending upon others and we must realize how much we depend on others to understand where an individual actually stands in this world." This quotation is itself a capsule description of the connectedness theme.

The women writers offered an array of responses to social pressures,not all of them predictable. The two women who wrote about being expected to be cheerful or socially outgoing did produce connected responses describing their attempts to please. Others, however, whether pressured to marry young, to choose between marriage and a career, or to conform to a community stereotype that did not fit them, asserted their rights to decide their own fates. The woman asked to choose between career and motherhood writes of "wanting it all and striving to get it," refusing to relinquish connection but asserting her right to autonomy. The Jewish woman who felt pressured to conform to a "WASP steroetype" in her high school and community asserts that "it's dangerous and destructive to try to be like everyone else; I must be who I am;" the woman whose family expects her to marry young and begin to raise a family has decided that ~even though I am considered strange, indeed a social outcast by my family and friends, I will not comply with this expectation they have placed upon me." The data suggest that although it remains true that more women than men face pressure to fulfill certain social expectations, those women feel free to meet those demands with assertions of their right to their own autonomony, their right to choose the roles they will play.

Topic II

In their responses to Topic 2, which called for them to discuss a decision they had made and now regretted, the largest group of writers discussed a decision having to do with either their education or choice of career. Most of these responses were autonomous, 56% of them from men and 44% from women. The patterns discussed in the analysis of the demand topic hold, with some differences allowed for the requirements of the topic. Thus, a man who unhappily pursued dentistry writes of having "learned what kind of person I am and to please myself;" a woman, having left a job that had promised glamour and financial success but left her unchallenged, asserts that "the security of a paycheck cannot make up for the thrill of being who you really are." The connected responses having to do with career choices reveal the writers' central concern with their relationships to others. Thus, a woman who quit a job against her father's judgment and precipitated a break in their relationship writes: "I now realize that you can't do things just to benefit yourself. Whenever you make a big decision you should talk it over with your family or those who may be hurt as a result of your decision. If others agree with you, chances are you have made a good decision." A man whose attempts to juggle too many demands on his time caused him to be an ineffective leader of a 4-H group admits that "I tried to do too many things at once and I learned that if you accept the responsibility of teaching something to others, you should plan ahead to make sure you can fulfill that agreement."

A number of writers (20%) discussed decisions involving

living arrangements. Not surprisingly, since by definition such decisions involve relationships to other people, connected responses outnumbered autonomous ones here, almost 3 to 1, with women producing the greater number of connected replies. A young woman who went to college away from home laments that "the worst part was feeling dis-connected with (sic) my family and friends." Another writes of the loneliness she experienced after moving into a studio apartment alone: "The improvement in my standard of living in no way compensated for the lack of a sense of community." Still another woman comments on the "positive changes in my life" when she moved out of an unsatisfactory group living arrangement into another with friends who were more compatible. One prototypically connected response came from the man who had actually managed to quit a mundane civil service job and move to the proverbial desert island. "I had thought and hoped that all my problems would be resolved by removing myself from society. But if one is to live and work in society, that is where the answers are to be found and problems worked out." It is unlikely that a woman would be surprised at what was, for this man, a startling discovery about the need for connection in our lives.

Unlike those to the demand topic, responses to the decision topic tend to center around concerns other than family pressures; but the themes of connection and autonomy remain, even when the particular matter under discussion is difficult to classify. A woman reflects on the pressure she put upon her boyfriend to take a trip:

> I feel that I could have been more supportive, rather than moping about the whole thing. I know that my behavior influenced Mike's decision to quit his job. He didn't want

> to disappoint me by cancelling the trip. Consequently. he is now faced with the dilemma of finding a job and I am still mad at myself for being so selfish.

Her regret centers on her concern for someone she loves and her dismay at what she now perceives as a misguided and self-centered (though successful) attempt to get her own way at his expense. A less typical response from a young man who tried to become friends with the prisoners he was teaching illustrates the complexities of connectedness:

> By the end of my residency, I had learned I could not be friends with the prisoners, that in fact I did not want to. I was there to teach them ...not to change their personalities or reform them. The experience taught me that distance between a teacher and a student is sometimes necessary. And as I became more comfortable with the distance I felt I needed for my own survival in the jail, the prisoners in turn began to respect me more. ...I had been ineffective. When I corrected my behavior I was able to regain my position as an instructor and create an environment where real learning was possible.

His response certainly illustrates this writer's concern for his own identity in a difficult situation; but primary is his concern for his failures as a teacher that persist until he is able to learn the appropriate ways of relating to the prisoners. Thus, although the problem is in part one of finding an appropriate individual stance, central to its solution is the writer's need to discover his real <u>relationship</u> to his students, the inmates. While this topic, like the other, produced a greater mumber of autonomous responses over all, and while women produced more of the connected responses than men, the variety of ways in which the concerns of connectedness surface in their writing suggests that connectedness remains an important issue for both women and men.

CONCLUSIONS:

We began this study expecting that women would in general produce

connected responses, while men would produce autonomous ones. It is true that women produced the largest number of connected responses for each topic, a finding that supported our initial sense that a reader could tell when a woman was the writer of a given essay. Close analysis has shown that the women in this study were more likely than the men to write about issues identified by Gilligan as "connected": family ties, relationships, guilt, conflict between personal needs and caring for others. But over all, most of the responses, from both men and women, were autonomous, a finding that contradicted our expectations but is not completely mysterious. While it may be true that Gilligan's themes are less pervasive in the society as a whole than she might have believed, there are a number of alternative explanation for these findings.

First of all, the population of San Francisco State University, whose students comprised the sample for this study, is typically somewhat older than that on many smaller college campuses, and many of the students, having lived and worked on their own for at least several years, are relatively secure in their own identities. It is also true that the wording of both topics calls for a personal, "I" centered response and that the "demand" topic actually expects students to preselect those occasions when they felt a surge of autonomy. Nonetheless, the overall proportion of autonomous to connected responses is dramatic, especially because the responses themselves dealt so frequently with issues raised by parents, as well as by peers and society as a whole.

It is in this finding that one explanation may in fact lie, since as young adults many of these writers, male and female are still very actively struggling with their need to separate from their parents in order to establish their own autonomous identities. While Chodorow,

Gilligan, and Noddings stress that men may experience less difficulty in achieving this autonomy than women, none would deny that in this culture, particularly in a setting such as the university where men and women are engaged in similar pursuit of often similar goals, women as well as men must indeed become autonomous.

Lakoff (1975) has stressed the importance of judging language only with reference to the real world context in which it was produced (p.59). It is neither coincidental nor incidental that all of the language studied here was produced in written response to a test. While both topics called for a personal response, the passing scores on these essays attest to the fact that the writers in the study correctly perceived the discourse situation as a test of their mastery of "school style," the same thesis/proof method of exposition that has been described by at least one recent writer as the "male mode of rhetoric." (Farrell, 1979). Mastery of rhetorical forms to some degree assumes mastery over content as well. And as Lakoff observes (p.57) academic women are among the least apt to be speakers of what she deems "women's language."

For at least fifteen years, women have been listening to the voices of other women urging them to find their place in the world outside as well as within the home. While economic necessity has always compelled them to work to support their families, women are now responding to a reality they helped to change by building careers for themselves in numbers greater than ever before. It is to be expected that, particularly on the campus of a large urban university, women have not just heard those messsages but are, from within a variety of cultural backgrounds, responding vigorously to them. One could argue that the women whose writing we studied are asserting their rights to an autonomy to which they finally feel entitled. At the same time, the connected responses of male writers in this study suggest a greater

freedom for men to respond to claims of commitment and care.

A central theme of the women's movement has come to be that it is vital to reclaim and maintain that which is essentially female in the culture. Among those things so defined are the cluster of qualities and concerns we have here called "connected." That women are expressing the opposite,traditionally male value of autonomy in great numbers, does not necessarily consistitue a sacrifice of feminine values. In A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf sketches a plan of the soul designed to accommodate two powers, one male, one female.

> ...in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. ... It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties (p.102).

We should not read too much into the findings of one modest study. But these appear to suggest that women, and to a lesser degree, their fellow students who are men, are finding it easier to express those "other" sides of themselves that may be less familiar but that promise a fuller identity than traditional ones alone.

NOTES

1. An important exception to this is the work of Mina Shaughnessy illuminating the reasons so many non traditional students experience great difficulty in writing for school and that of Andrea Lunsford analyzing the content of basic writers' school essays. Janet Hays and Susan Miller have also studied the content of students' essays in an effort to determine rhetorical and discursive maturity.

2. Noddings (1984) has called for a system of ethics and moral education to be built upon this framework of what she calls "natural caring."

* Holistic scoring is a method of evaluation in which raters read an entire paper through, without marking errors, and assign it a score based upon its effectiveness as a total composition.

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